

the fosterling that has cost them so much. And so when Skeat judges Langland, not indeed (like Byron) greater than. Chaucer, but 'equally admirable'; when he cries that 'the supposition of such passages being written by a poet of less power than William is like supposing there may have been two Shakespeares', with such foster-parental fondness one may sympathise but cannot, surely, even begin to agree.

What is there actually in Langland for the ordinary reader, in a world already overcrowded with good literature? As a whole, his poem is impossible—floundering, unintelligent, as out of date as a dinosaur. Allegories and sermons we find to-day almost unreadable at best; certainly when, as here, they topple over one another in seething queues to get at us, there is nothing for it but to run. Allegory indeed is a sort of literary algebra. It can please still, but only when handled with a certain mathematical exactitude, a certain witty neatness of mind; as, for instance, with the Musical Banks in *Erewhon*. In the parables of the *New Testament*, in a Morality like *Everyman*, in La Fontaine and Bunyan, Swift and Samuel Butler, such symbolism still succeeds, because it is straightforward; in Langland, in Spenser, in Blake's prophetic books it fails because it is muddled, and is redeemed only in part by their other qualities. Allegory is in short a shoe that must fit perfectly, neither too rigid nor

too loose, if
the work that stands on it is not to Hmp or
shuffle to a
lame conclusion. It is in a word no use, like
Spenser,
making your hero slay Error, only to be led
into error
by someone else a moment after.

And if Langland's method has lost its
appeal, so too,
for many of us, has his message. His
theology has become
mydiology. The Seven Deadly Sins have
retired from
public life; we struggle in their place with
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